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Congressional Committee Needed To Keep Rope on Mysterious CIA

The Central Intelligence Agency, a cloudy organism of uncertain purpose and appalling power, promises to have an uncomfortable time of it in 1964.

Former President Truman, who hatched the coiling, mysterious creature, spoiled the holidays for the busy apologists of the CIA by firing a telling broadside in a copyrighted newspaper article.

Mr. Truman is no great shucks as a writer, but there is nothing wrong with his thinking or his facts. He echoed the charge (early made here) that the monstrous spook apparatus had metastasized into policy-making and operational functions, neither of which was intended by the founders of the CIA.

WELL, NOW, IN spite of the outraged howls of denial by the nominal head of the CIA, both charges are quite true. With smug piety the CIA blandly insists that it does not bother to deny or affirm stories about it, but the truth is that it squeals like a shoat stuck under a gate when unpleasant truths about it get into print. It also does its poor best to gut any reporter who has the courage to take it on, a fact appended here as fair warning to any of my colleagues who feel up to joining the good fight.

Now comes Sen. Eugene McCarthy, D., Minn., with a piece in the Saturday Evening Post dated Jan. 4. The article, bluntly entitled "The CIA is Getting Out of Hand," is commended to all who are concerned with the future of the American experiment in freedom.

Senator McCarthy is a handier writer than Mr. Truman, even if he is covering substantially the same course. He writes: "The CIA, in short, is making foreign policy and, in so doing, is assuming the roles of the President and the Congress.

IT HAS TAKEN on the character of an invisible government answering only to itself. This must stop. The CIA must be made accountable for its activities, not only to the President but also to Congress through a responsible committee."

There are two points that need making here. One, to be sure, is that Senator McCarthy is a far cry from his late namesake, in that he is an informed and respected public

official who is not given to making baseless charges for the sake of headlines. Next, it is important to note that he not only urges establishment of a congressional committee to oversee the CIA, he specifies a responsible—that is, effective—committee.

THE BACKGROUND here is that the joint committee on atomic energy, after which the inevitable joint committee on the CIA doubtless will be patterned, was not automatically successful in bending the AEC to the will of the Congress and the people. The AEC, like the CIA and every other headstrong bureaucracy ever concocted, was not easy to break to harness. Fortunately, however, the Joint Committee on Atomic Energy was led by the late Sen. Brien McMahon, D., Conn., in its early days and he was a man not easy to hoodwink. Later, Sen. Clinton P. Anderson, D., N. M., did notable and courageous duty in persuading the AEC that Congress meant it.

Plainly the same treatment is long overdue for the CIA. Small (and some not-so-small) governments throughout the world live in trembling and fear of the CIA.

IN HIS ADMIRABLE essay Senator McCarthy makes the point that "wrapped in its cloak of secrecy, the Central Intelligence Agency modestly hints it has overthrown foreign governments, admits that it violates international law and doesn't deny that one of its exploits wrecked a summit conference."

He sums up some of the more unlovely exploits of the huge espionage apparatus, and reiterates the charge laid by Mr. Truman and others: That the agency has overwhelmed and distorted the purposes for which it was started in 1947. "Less than 20 years later—with 14,000 employees, including specialists in intelligence analysis and espionage, U-2 pilots and assassins—the director of the Central Intelligence Agency is rated one of the half-dozen most powerful men in Washington," Senator McCarthy writes.

Of course a congressional committee is urgently needed to keep a rope on the CIA. The secrecy argument against it is wholly phony. In his strange and plantive book, "The Craft of Intelligence," Allan Dulles (who was titular head of the CIA when the spooks fouled up the Bay of Pigs invasion) admits that he never had a confidence betrayed in Congress.